

## EMPLOYMENT OF NATIVE WOMEN AT THE NORMAN WELLS PROJECT:

### GOALS AND PROBLEMS

Supplementary Report: Summer, 1985

#### Purpose

The purpose of this work was basically to return to each of the communities where interviews were done, to report on the findings of the study and answer questions or hear comments on it. This was done in order to respond to the complaint of the Dene communities that the findings of research done in their communities are so often not reported back to them. The trip was also to check the interpretation of the findings by discussing it with community members.

#### Work Plan

Travel was done to Fort Norman, Fort Franklin, and Fort Simpson. While a meeting of community women who had worked at the Norman Wells Project, or any other interested persons, would have been a good way to communicate this information, this proved to be more or less impossible to organize. There were good reasons for this. As a direct result of the Norman Wells Project, the so-called "impact" communities have had many, many, studies done of them. This work was often perceived as irrelevant, or redundant, or just an invasion of privacy. As a consequence even studies directly sponsored by northern

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Native groups have had difficulty getting the cooperation they need. Also, there were a great many meetings this summer, with many pressures and demands on the "activist" members of the community. On the positive side, this study has been considered an accurate reflection of the situation, so nobody was motivated to demand a public outlet for critical comment.

What was done was to contact "key informants" in each of these communities, for some person-to-person discussion of the study. These individuals ranged from Band Managers, Band employment officers, and Band Councilors, to a social worker, the presidents of Metis locals, alcohol program workers, and individuals suggested by the above people. Copies of the "Brief Outline" of the study were also handed out in each community.

As with the original study, the researcher spoke only with Native informants in these communities, to try to ensure that the point of view of Dene and Metis women was reflected as well as possible. In Yellowknife, two staff members of the Native Women's Association were also consulted.

Copies of the Report were sent, with letters asking for comments, to Esso Resources and Interprovincial Pipelines last May, but neither company responded.



Supplementary Remarks

In spite of the fact that there appears to be no community disapproval of women seeking this type of work, supplementary interviews suggest that the women do have some disadvantages. It was found in the original study that women did almost exclusively chambermaid and kitchen work. One of the main problems found was not knowing the range of jobs that were available. Apparently the visits to the communities by industry, regarding employment, were mainly used by men (to the extent that they were used). One person told me that she thought the women were shy about attending these meetings, and in some cases did not know that women and men were both invited to attend. Women seem to have difficulties with access to information, etc., even more than the men. One social worker explained that although many people were happy about the availability of jobs at first, they did not understand that they were only temporary. As a result, they felt betrayed when the jobs ended. Effective and accurate communication about all aspects of an employment situation is very important.

Men also were routinely recruited by various sub-contractors for outdoor work which was not more skilled than what the women were doing, but paid more. As with other employment issues, the terms of the "benefits package" of the Norman Wells Agreement entered into by the two proponents (Esso Resources and Interprovincial Pipelines) were not always transmitted effectively to the sub-contractors doing the actual hiring. As far as outdoor work is concerned, the study found



that well over half of local women are willing to work outdoors and do hard physical labour, and a substantial 68% prefer other than office type of work. Lack of information about the range of jobs resulted in applications that did not specify any particular job sought. This in turn would have contributed further to the women not being considered for anything but chambermaid and kitchen help.

Getting the same old unskilled job has become quite a frustration. The demands for training by these communities have changed to demands for more technical training and more responsible jobs. "Public relations" work by government and industry around the Norman Wells Project and Pipeline has raised these expectations for employment, but the project did not fulfill them. Some informants believe that the companies deliberately raised false expectations. As with the original study, women did not mention difficulties coping with the job requirements or the living situation away from home. If anything, they said their jobs were "boring". The preliminary report of a much larger study - the Native Employment Training Study (F. Abele) - appears to confirm that Native workers do not have difficulty with job requirements or camp living. Dissatisfaction seems to occur for other and deeper reasons.

There is another facet of the young women's experience that is rather different from that of the men. Sharing of personal income among the family is a strong community value, but it appears that the women were more likely to put their money into things like rent and furniture, and items for their parents, whereas the young men used



their money for skidoos, guns, trucks, boat motors, etc. Although the use of these items is usually shared to some extent, they are much more in the nature of "personal property" than what the young women used their money for. As a result, some young women felt little direct personal benefit from working after they had bought a few special items for the family, because of the responsibility they felt to turn their money over to the family.

Although parents and relatives cared for children of working mothers (most of whom were single mothers), they still had to be given money for groceries and other expenses, and possibly paid as well. The combined effect of this, and the sharing of income mentioned above, is that although most of the Native women working in connection with the N.W.P. and Pipeline were quite young, they often carried a heavy weight of responsibility. This would most likely not be apparent to most employers and supervisors, who are of course non-Native, since young non-Native women (and men) probably occupy a more privileged or carefree position as "youth" than Native young adults. It was also strongly reiterated that child-care was a serious obstacle to the pursuit of these jobs for women, both financially and for other practical reasons.

One local Band is working on a "resource development policy". A key item in this policy is the view that, in general, consultation with communities should occur before application is made to regulatory authorities, in order to give the communities more meaningful input. A comment I would add is that this should also apply to training and

their money for sundries, guns, trucks, boat motors, etc. Although the use of these items is usually limited in some extent, they are such a part of the culture of "personal property" that when the young women use their money for, as a result, some young women will likely direct personal benefit from working after they had bought a few special items for the family, because of the responsibility they wish to transfer money over to the family.

Although parents and relatives care for children of working women (and of other working mothers), they still had to be given money for groceries and other expenses, and possibly paid as well. The common view of the working women in connection with the family is that they are not really fully responsible for the family. This would mean that they are not be expected to have complete and adequate, and are of course non-habitual, their own non-habitual work and probably occupy a more limited or casual position as "young" than those young women. It was also strongly indicated that children was a serious

problem in the event of their loss for women, both financially and for other practical reasons.

The fact that is working on a "resource development policy". A key term in this policy is the view that, in general, consultation with communities should occur before application is made to regulatory

employment agreements, so that people will have more adequate time to prepare for possible employment benefits, and so programs can be better tailored to community needs.

No one objected to the findings of the study or the interpretation. Several people remarked that it was also clear and easy to read. The rough analysis of the number of Native women who worked at the Norman Wells Project (a rough count was all that was possible), suggests that almost all of them who had worked there up to the time of the interviews had been interviewed during the study, in addition to the ones interviewed who had not had these jobs. A study of this size does not deal in depth with all important employment issues for Native women. However, it was concluded that, so far as the study goes, its findings are accurate.

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